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**For Information**

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**REPORT TITLE: Peel Poverty Reduction Committee 2020 Update**

**FROM: Janice Sheehy, Commissioner of Human Services**

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**OBJECTIVE**

To update Regional Council on the progress of the 2018-2028 Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy.

**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- The Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy was updated in 2018 and endorsed by Regional Council (Resolution 2018-458).
  - The ten-year plan introduced a new governance structure that includes Lived Experience, Advocacy and Awareness Roundtables; it focuses on Income Security, Well Being and Social Inclusion; and, Economic Opportunities.
  - The Peel Poverty Reduction Committee co-chairs are the President and CEO of United Way Greater Toronto and the Director, Community Partnerships, Human Services.
  - The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on barriers, system gaps, and the impact of anti-Black racism, racism, and systemic discrimination for people experiencing low-income.
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**DISCUSSION**

**1. Background**

The Peel Poverty Reduction Committee (PPRC), co-chaired by the United Way Greater Toronto, and the Region of Peel, was created in 2008. Through engagement and co-design with the community and community organizations, PPRC developed its 2018-2028 Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy (Appendix I), the first community-based poverty reduction committee to create a ten-year plan.

The refreshed strategy focuses on three important pillars to reducing poverty in Peel: Income Security, Economic Opportunities, and Well-being and Social Inclusion. The Committee consists of more than 80 individuals representing various sectors, partners, collaborative networks, community agencies and residents, working collectively to reduce and mitigate the effects of poverty for individuals and families in Peel. The Strategy was endorsed by Regional Council in 2018 (Resolution 2018-458).

Poverty continues to impact large numbers of individuals and families. Although Peel Region is diverse and prosperous, not all residents enjoy the same level of prosperity, social inclusion and well-being. Appendix II, Poverty in Peel Facts at a Glance, provides some examples of the extent of poverty in the region.

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### 2. Implementation of the Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy

The new Peel Poverty Reduction Committee's governance structure was implemented in 2020. There are seven action tables, including a Lived Experience and Advocacy and Awareness Roundtables, drive the implementation of the strategy.

Central to the updated strategy was the deliberate inclusion of people with living or lived experience of poverty in Brampton, Caledon and Mississauga. A Lived Experience Roundtable was launched in 2019 and its inaugural members represent the breadth of Peel's diversity including racialized communities, seniors, LGBTQ, youth, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, single parents, individuals that had interactions with the justice system, individuals living with mental health and addictions, as well as newcomers and refugees.

The Lived Experience Roundtable provides important feedback and input on a range of issues impacting people experiencing poverty; supports the implementation of actions and initiatives identified by the PPRC; promotes and expands awareness of the Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy; and, influences community participation in poverty reduction initiatives. Most importantly, the members ensure that the voices of individuals with lived experience are embedded in every action undertaken by the PPRC.

To date, the Lived Experience Roundtable has participated in several consultations throughout 2020 including:

- The Ontario 2020 Budget Consultation submission;
- The Point-in-Time survey (Region of Peel, Housing Services division);
- Peel Food Action Council's Three-Year Strategic Plan;
- The Region of Peel's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy;
- Housing and Homelessness Coordinated Access (Region of Peel, Housing Services division); and,
- COVID-19 Pandemic Prevention and Vulnerabilities (Region of Peel, Peel Public Health).

These consultations have provided both Regional staff and community partners with invaluable opportunities to acquire a better understanding of the challenges faced by residents and ensure that policies, programs and initiatives are responsive to residents experiencing poverty.

The Advocacy and Awareness Roundtable, chaired by Ontario4All, is comprised of residents and community stakeholders who monitor and identify new or emerging community-level issues as well as changes to current federal, provincial, and municipal policies and/or legislation that impact people experiencing poverty. The Roundtable provides recommendations for collective and/or individual advocacy responses and acts as a liaison filtering information to the other PPRC tables for further action. Aligned to the PPRC values, the membership of the Advocacy and Awareness Roundtable consists of advocates, staff from across diverse systems as well as residents. To date they have addressed urgent issues related to housing and provided feedback on the Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy, to name a few.

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### 3. Addressing the Impacts of COVID-19 Within Peel Poverty Reduction Committee Priorities

Like many other initiatives and strategies, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the PPRC's planned activities this year; for example, the plans for a living wage campaign had to be moved to 2021. The Lived Experience Roundtable members have shared their firsthand experiences of increased isolation, food insecurity and limited access to medical and other services as well as technology and internet for their school aged children. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic and recent discussions on anti-Black racism, racism, and systemic discrimination have brought the issues of the disproportionate impact of poverty among racialized communities to the forefront; identified the need to break down data by race and other demographics to better understand who is most impacted; and, raised concerns about why racialized people, especially Black, South Asian and Latinos are overrepresented in COVID-19 cases.

In response to the issues that are emerging in 2020, the Peel Poverty Reduction Committee refocused its efforts on supporting members of the Lived Experience Roundtable and ensuring they are included in important discussions on issues such as housing, social supports and income programs. In addition, the Advocacy and Awareness Roundtable provided crucial timely advocacy positions on the most urgent issues that emerged or became magnified during COVID-19. Two of these issues are as follows:

**Housing** - the PPRC and its partners continue to advocate against Bill 184, *Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act, 2020*. The primary concern regarding this Bill is that it would create an additional pathway of eviction for landlords that would effectively circumvent the Landlord and Tenant Board, thus opening the door to mass evictions which would disproportionately impact low-income renters. As a result of correspondence from the Committee and related delegations, Regional Council moved Resolution 2020-807, requesting that the provincial government immediately restrict all residential rental evictions, maintain this moratorium until the COVID-19 pandemic is effectively contained; and, provide additional funding through the Social Services Relief Fund.

**Access to Technology** - the pandemic underscored the importance of access to technology and the internet; the Committee sees this as essential given the shift to online learning programs and services. Members of the Community Response Table and the PPRC are working on an advocacy position to address this important issue and will continue to explore and identify tactics to address the digital divide in Peel during and post the COVID-19 pandemic.

The feedback from the Lived Experience Roundtable consultation included recommendations on priorities during the recovery phase.

These include:

- Housing assistance to support eviction prevention, rental supports, and accessible and affordable housing;
- Financial assistance to support people to access jobs and resources available in the community;
- Financial literacy and increased awareness of services and supports, such as tax filing and other financial benefits programs; and,
- Health supports, including mental health and access to clinics for testing and treatment of illnesses such as Sexually Transmitted Diseases.

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As a result of this feedback, the PPRC is moving forward to address these key issues through specific initiatives and engagement with system stakeholders. For example, the Committee is developing a financial literacy infographic for residents to increase awareness of tax benefits and credits that may be available to them and to support improved financial literacy more broadly.

### Next Steps

The 2020 Peel Poverty Reduction Committee's priorities were revised or adapted to ensure that they were responsive to key issues that were amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To meet its outcomes, the Committee will continue to:

- Ensure the voices of the Lived Experience Roundtable members is embedded in the work of the Peel Poverty Reduction Committee;
- Drive the collective implementation of the 2018-2028 Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy through strong collaborative partnerships; and,
- Address systemic discrimination and anti-Black racism by applying these lenses to foster equitable and inclusive access to programs and services.

The Peel Poverty Reduction Committee and Strategy continues to play an instrumental role in ensuring the community works collectively with the Region of Peel, United Way Greater Toronto, stakeholders, and others to reduce and mitigate the impact of poverty on Peel residents. Given the current and anticipated longer-term impact of COVID-19 on Peel region's most vulnerable residents, the Committee's work has become more urgent.

### APPENDICES

Appendix I - 2018-2028 Poverty Reduction Strategy

Appendix II - Poverty in Peel Facts at a Glance 2019

Appendix III - PPRC Governance Structure

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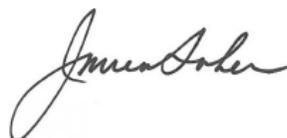
*For further information regarding this report, please contact Sonia Pace, Director- Community Partnerships, Ext. 3807, [sonia.pace@peelregion.ca](mailto:sonia.pace@peelregion.ca)*

*Authored By: Augustina Nagberi-Asseez, Specialist, Strategic Planning Poverty Reduction; Sara Annou, Specialist, Strategic Planning Poverty Reduction; and Aleisha Cherrie-Apang, Advisor, Poverty Reduction Initiatives*

#### **Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:**

Department Commissioner and Division Director.

Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.



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Janice Baker, Chief Administrative Officer